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InnerView

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Reporters from this newspaper recently had an experience that would make most newshounds pant: An hour with the Director of the CIA, Stansfield Turner.

We rode into the CIA on the coattails of Panax corporate staff and editors who set up the visit as part of a three-day seminar on national security.

The CIA generally has refused to meet with journalists. We had the tendency to ask sticky questions about the Agency's role in Chile or its policy on domestic surveillance.

IT LOOKS LIKE things are beginning to change for the good. Gone are slick pros like Helms and Colby. George Bush and others have left to seek their political fortunes on the stump.

Turner, a former admiral and friend of Jimmy Carter's, has the demeanor of a bull-dog. Nothing insecure surfaces when he greets a room full of potential adversaries.

He explains the two chief functions of the CIA: collection of secrets through the use of spies and electronic equipment; evaluation of that data through the use of highly sophisticated computers and technicians.

TURNER HOVERED over the issue of clandestine activity in foreign countries without

coming down to land. Throughout the hearings and disclosures of the past four years, the Agency never once suggested it might stop these activities. We just assumed they will continue, whether we embarrassed the Director with questions or not.

Unlike his predecessors, Turner seems to understand the role of the press in the scheme of things. He admitted an "adversary relationship." We each have our jobs to do: ours is to get secrets from government agencies so the public can stay informed, theirs is to get secrets from foreign countries so the government can stay informed.

Turner said he has been trying to make his staff "more security conscious." He doesn't want our job to be any easier. "I'm taking a lot of steps around here to cut you off" from sources, he added.

THAT'S ALRIGHT. As long as there are secrets there will be spies and newsmen. And leaks. We both deal in information.

What's refreshing, coming from a man who must be under pressure to clean up the Agency and at the same time watch this nation's enemies, is that he can understand it is not just the intelligence agencies who need to know.

The public needs to know what sort of things are being done in the name of the United States. That's where we come in. We're glad Turner understands what we are going to be doing while he is at Langley. Now he can't act surprised.